

The Successful Rhododendron Bed

BY

Harlan P. Kelsey, Salem, Mass.

Owner, Boxford Nursery, East Boxford, Massachusetts

Highlands Nursery, Pineola, North Carolina

"Kelsey's Hardy American Plants"



How to Grow Rhododendrons Successfully

Simple Rules Which Will Bring Pleasing and Lasting
Results If Carefully Followed



The highest ambition of the plant-lover is to have a successful bed of Rhododendrons together with other ericaceæ and flowering plants that naturally go with them. How few succeed is well known. Many, discouraged by the imagined or heard-of difficulties, never even make the attempt; yet, under average conditions, success is as simple and sure as with ordinary shrubs. It is a question of doing the right thing before, during and after planting.

Nature Knows Best. Rhododendrons—and I include under this term Azaleas, Kalmias, (Mt. Laurel) Leucothoës, Blueberries and other ericaceous genera and similar native (and exotic) plants—grow naturally in shady, damp situations, being surface feeders, with fine, hair-like rootlets. Plainly therefore, dry, hard ground or drought checks growth or kills outright; nature provides against this by supplying a mulch of leaves the year round; few gardeners have learned this lesson.

First Excavate the Bed, unless conditions are already favorable. A deep porous soil prevents drought; excavate 2 to 3 feet or more, and see that in clay soils good drainage is provided, so that water will not stagnate in the bottom and make "sour ground."

Material for the Bed. Rhododendrons live largely on vegetable mold and humus, presumably through the medium of a mycelium, which increases rapidly under suitable conditions; therefore fill in the excavation with woods or leaf mold, good loam, rotted field-sods and a third in bulk of swamp muck or pulverized peat; while filling in this mixture one-tenth of sharp sand, or even more, should be added; if any manure is used, it must in every case be well rotted and practically reduced to humus. The center of the bed or plantation may be raised 6 to 12 inches above surrounding ground, after allowing for natural settling.

Planting. Plant the same depth as before (shown by earth line, or "collar" on stem) and firmly press soil around roots with the foot, but don't pack the earth too solid—Rhododendrons are not telegraph poles. "Fillers," including Lilies and other bulbs and smaller ground-covering species, should be planted after the larger plants are all in and properly spaced. Then soak the ground and apply the mulching.

The Great Secret. Mulch, and yet mulch again, all the year round. This is the great Rhododendron secret. As soon as planted, cover the entire surface of the ground with a vegetable mulching—preferably hard wood leaves—to the depth of several inches when reasonably well packed. Never remove this mulching, but let it remain the year round, and every fall add a new layer of similar depth. A foot of leaves in the fall means but a half-inch or so of humus the coming season—the future food of the Rhododendrons or Azaleas. A thin dressing of loam and well-rotted manure may be used to hold down the fresh leaves as an aid to decay. The leaves keep the surface cool in summer and warm in winter. This is the great secret of Rhododendron-growing.

August and September are the most successful months for planting Rhododendrons, Kalmias, Azaleas, Leucothoës, etc., and specimen conifers or cone bearing evergreens. Send for special list giving details and prices.

KELSEY'S HARDY AMERICAN RHODODENDRONS

Winter Protection. If convenient, protect them with pine or other evergreen boughs, particularly where exposed to the sun and wind; yet Rhododendrons rarely suffer in the latitude of Boston or Buffalo, if properly planted and mulched.

In the latitude of Ottawa and Quebec, Canada, a board fencing may be placed around the edge of the bed and much heavier temporary mulching of straw, etc., filled in almost or quite to the tops of the plants. It is rarely necessary to build a board cover, except on southern exposures to prevent sunburn, or with tender varieties not suitable for general planting, and even then evergreen boughs are preferable. Good ventilation must be provided.

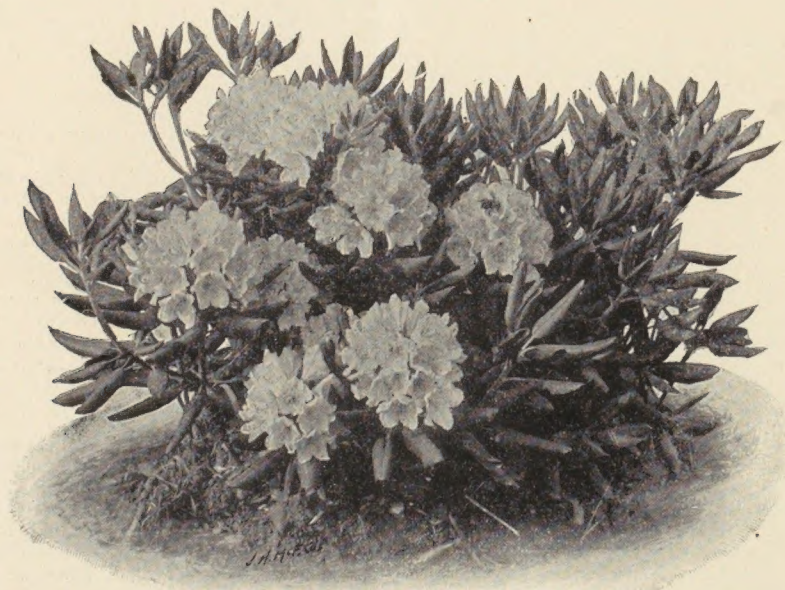
Selecting the Location. For the Rhododendron bed, a northern exposure is preferable, especially in low elevation in the South, or elsewhere where freezing and thawing is quite continual. A direct winter sun on the frozen leaves of any broad-leaved evergreen often kills outright or spoils the foliage. The north side of the building, wall, woods or hill is always preferable, and wind-swept locations should be avoided, unless proper measures are taken to check the heavy winds.

Limestone Soils Means Death. Most ericaceous plants, and particularly Rhododendrons, Kalmias, Azaleas, Leucothoës, Vacciniums, Andromedas, Galax, Epigæa and similar species, and some Lilies and Ferns will not endure large quantities of lime in any form. Permanent satisfactory results cannot be had, therefore, in soils impregnated with lime, and, where such conditions exist, excavation and filling in with proper materials must be resorted to. Sulfate of magnesia in considerable quantities is said to be a specific for limestone conditions, but conclusive experiments are yet to be made.

Acid Soil Necessary. In other words acid soil is a requirement for growing Rhododendrons and similar plants successfully. The leaf mulch applied annually maintains acid soil conditions which otherwise in time might become alkaline.

In Limestone Regions these ericaceous plants may be grown with good success by excavating the bed as described above and filling in with top wood soil, peat and similar material. Spent or live tan bark should then be used if available to cover the leaf mulching, it having proved an active agent in producing persistent non-alkaline or acid conditions.

Blueberry (Vacciniums) Culture will not be successful excepting where the soil is naturally acid or at least neutral making it possible to artificially produce an acid condition on a relatively large scale.



RHODODENDRON CATAWBIENSE, True species. This is the hardiest of all Rhododendrons, and is native in the high Carolina mountains. The hardiest hybrids owe their hardiness to this species. Illustration shows a 2 ft. clump the way we grow Rhododendrons for results. Everything considered *catawbiense* is the best of all.

THE SUCCESSFUL RHODODENDRON BED

Enemies of the Rhododendron

Rhododendrons, Kalmias and similar plants have few enemies. The only serious one I know is the Lace-wing Fly, which is native from New England throughout the Alleghanies, and is found on *Kalmia angustifolia*, *Rhododendron maximum*, *Kalmia latifolia* and occasionally on almost any broad-leaved evergreen or deciduous tree or shrub. This pest appears in early spring on the under side of the leaves and gets its sustenance by sucking the sap. The leaves turn brown, giving the plant a ragged unkempt appearance. It is easily disposed of by spraying the under side of the leaves, using a very fine nozzle, with an emulsion of ten gallons of whale-oil soap to one hundred gallons of water. While the Lace-wing Fly is more at home on Rhododendrons maximum, it does not hesitate to attack all other species to a greater or less extent. Plants in the shade are rarely infested to any great degree.

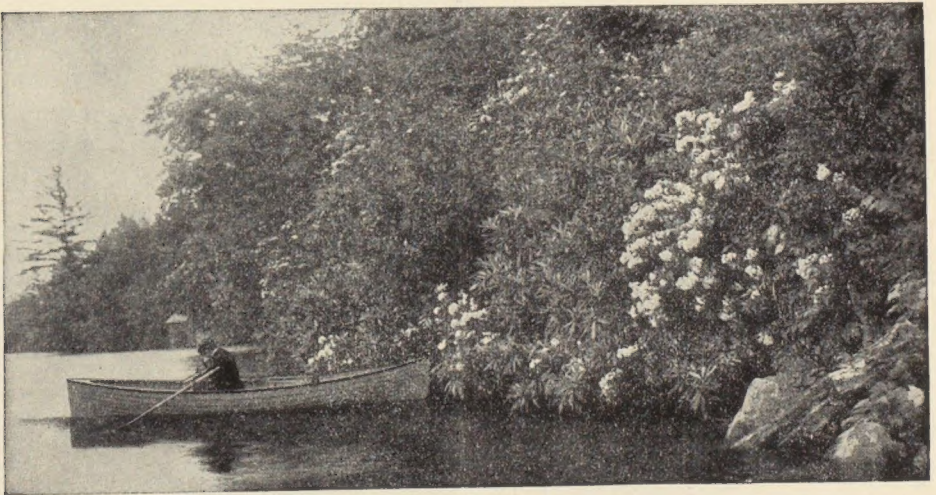
"Fillers"—Plants to be Used with Rhododendrons

For the best landscape effects, as well as providing a continual succession of bloom throughout the season, and actually protecting the Rhododendrons and supplying a "feathered" edge to the ground, a large variety of shrubs and plants may be employed with the finest results. In fact, the planting of Rhododendrons without the use of "filler" or "edging" plants may give harsh, formal effects, which are neither desirable nor natural in any way. In the use of "fillers" great care must be taken as to time of blooming and color effects, so they do not clash. It is surprising how many "filler" plants can be used without detracting from the broad evergreen effect, and yet supplying an amazing amount of interesting detail and a continuous show of blossoms against a beautiful Rhododendron leaf background.

Some of the Best "Fillers" and "Edging Plants"

Andromeda polifolia, *Chamaedaphne calyculata* (Leatherleaf), *Leiophyllum buxifolium*, (Sand Myrtle), *L. prostratum* (Mountain Heath) *Ilex glabra* (Inkberry), *Leucothoe catesbaei* (*Leucothoe*), *Pieris floribunda* (*Andromeda*), *Taxus minor* (Canada Yew), *Galax aphylla* (*Galax*), *Gaultheria procumbens* (Wintergreen), *Houstonia* (Bluets), *Mitchella repens* (Partridgeberry), *Shortia galacifolia* (Oconee Bells), *Vinca minor* (Periwinkle), *V. minor alba* (White Periwinkle), *Zanthorhiza apiifolia* (Yellowroot), Lilies, Trilliums, *Erythroniums* (Dogtooth Violets), Ferns in great variety, Violets, *Dicentra eximia* (Fern Bleedingheart), Iris in great variety particularly *pseudacorus* and Japanese; Azaleas in variety; *Ilex verticillata* (Black Alder), *Aronias* (Chokeberry) in variety and many other "berry-bearing" shrubs.

Jonquils and other spring bulbs may be used freely near the borders of plantations with charming results.



MOUNTAIN LAUREL (*Kalmia*) and RHODODENDRONS at water's edge. Naturalistic planting gives the most charming results.

KELSEY'S HARDY AMERICAN RHODODENDRONS

American Rhododendrons

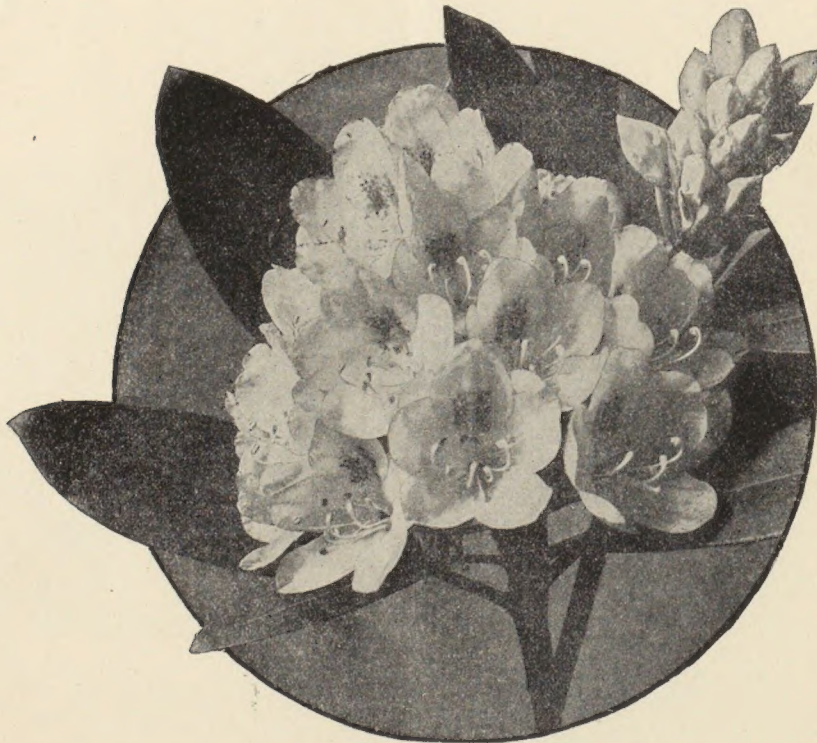
The American Native Rhododendrons are at last coming into their own. Being absolutely hardy as far north as Quebec they assure success where the half-hardy hybrids have so often proved a failure. Even where "hybrids" are used the dark foliaged American species should form the main background.

Rhododendron carolinianum. A new American species. Clear pink. Absolutely hardy. This is one of our finest introductions and fills a long-felt want for a hardy dwarf Rhododendron with flowers free from any hint of magenta. It was described and named by Alfred Rehder, of the Arnold Arboretum. It is the smallest Alleghanian species, attaining a height of 6 to 8 feet in cultivation. The thick-set leaves are dark green, usually blunt and narrow, covered with rusty dots below, much smaller than either *maximum* or *catawbiense*. Flower-clusters appear in greatest profusion in June, covering the plant with a rose-colored mantle. Fine for rocky slopes or hillsides, standing exposure unusually well and invaluable as a single specimen or for massing.

Rhododendron catawbiense. Of the Carolina mountains. The hardest of all Rhododendrons. It was this magnificent Rhododendron that over a hundred years ago was introduced into Europe, supplying, together with *Rhododendron maximum*, color and hardy blood to the cultivated "hybrids," but with a consequent loss of hardiness; and so today, for American gardens, where ironclad hardiness is essential, we must turn to the true original species, found on the loftiest, coldest peaks of the southern Alleghanies, where it attains a height of 20 to 30 feet. Considering the extreme hardiness, color of flower, compact growth, and remarkable texture of foliage, which is a deep, shining green, and far superior to the better-known *Rhododendron maximum*, we can recommend the true native *catawbiense* as the finest for general use, withstanding exposure and extremes of temperature where other Rhododendrons fail. Unlike *Rhododendron maximum*, it is a very free bloomer, with foliage of a dark, rich, lasting green, which never rusts. The trusses are a bright red-purple (in marked contrast to the muddy purple of the semi-hardy, half-breed imported variety), and as sent out by Highlands Nursery is always on its own roots. For massing to produce a broad-leaved evergreen landscape effect, there is no plant equal to it in the latitude of the northern United States and Canada, where strictly hardy plants must be employed.

Rhododendron maximum or Great American Rosebay is without doubt the noblest of American broad-leaved shrubs. It is found growing sparingly in New England and New York, more abundantly in the Pennsylvania mountains, but reaching perfection only in the southern Alleghany mountains, where it grows in such luxuriance as to form a striking feature in the mountain landscape. Its large, waxy white or delicately pink flowers appear in large trusses in July, the latest of all the Rhododendrons, greatly enhancing its ornamental value as a broad-leaved evergreen for finished landscape effect.

Not even in Asia do Rhododendrons grow more luxuriantly than in our southern Alleghany Mountains, where they attain a height of 30 feet or more. They must be seen in their native lavishness of growth and bloom on the mountain-sides or hanging over the dashing ice-cold streams and waterfalls, to be properly appreciated, and a trip to the high Carolina mountains in spring and early summer is a never-to-be-forgotten series of joys to the lover of nature.



RHODODENDRON MAXIMUM. White, sometimes shaded a delicate blush.

THE SUCCESSFUL RHODODENDRON BED

The Best Hardy Exotic and Hybrid Rhododendrons

Rhododendron laetevirens (wilsonianum). A hardy, hybrid, dwarf Rhododendron of garden origin, probably a cross between *R. punctatum* and *R. ferrugineum*. Compact growth, profusion of deep rose-colored flowers.

Rhododendron myrtifolium. A fine hardy hybrid between *R. punctatum* and *R. hirsutum*. This variety is very useful for the rockery and the borders of the Rhododendron bed. Clusters of rosy-pink flowers.

Rhododendron catawbiense Hybrids. Hardest varieties including the following:

album elegans, blush changing to white.

album grandiflorum, delicate pink.

Boule de Neige, blush-white.

caractacus, deep crimson.

catawbiense album, white.

Charles Bagelay, cherry-red.

Charles Dickens, dark red, spotted brown.

Charles S. Sargent, rich crimson.

delicatissimum, blush edged pink.

Edward S. Rand, scarlet.

everestianum, rosy-lilac, crisped edges.

F. D. Godman, crimson, dark blotch.

giganteum, bright rose.

gloriosum, pale rose.

Hannibal, rose late.

H. H. Hunnewell, dark crimson.

Henry W. Sargent, crimson.

Ignatius Sargent, bright rose-scarlet.

Lady Clermont, rosy-scarlet.

Mrs. C. S. Sargent, pink with yellow splotch.

Mrs. Milner, rich crimson.

purpureum elegans, royal-purple.

roseum elegans, deep rosy-purple.

roseum luteum, rose, blotched yellow.

Kalmia Latifolia. The Mountain Laurel

One of the grandest of our native, broad-leaved, evergreen shrubs, attaining tree-like proportions in our southern mountains. In cultivation it is a broad, thick shrub, and, when in full bloom, of surpassing beauty. The wheel-shaped flowers in close terminal corymbs, pure white to pink, appear in May or in June in such profusion as almost to smother the foliage. Its thick, shiny leaves, conspicuous the year around, makes it a shrub of greatest value for massing. The hardness of *Kalmia latifolia* is beyond doubt, it being found sparingly in Nova Scotia and increasingly in abundance through New England and the middle Atlantic States (particularly in the higher altitudes), till the crest of the southern Alleghenies is reached. Here the true American home of the broad-leaved ericaceae and perfect conditions of soil and climate are found, producing such luxuriance of growth as to form veritable jungles of gorgeous beauty, miles in extent. It is found throughout South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida, along the banks of streams and cypress swamps. This proves it to be a plant that will stand almost semi-tropical conditions as well as extreme cold. It is therefore extremely valuable for the southern states, taking its place with the magnificent Indian Azaleas, which are not hardy in the North.

Other Hardy Broad-Leaved Evergreens

There is a wide use for this material in connection with Rhododendron planting, to supply variety and give finished edges and borders.

CHAMAEDAPHNE calyculata. Leather Leaf. 2 to 3 feet. A fine hardy border plant for the Rhododendron bed or very moist locations. White, nodding flowers in early spring.

EUONYMUS radicans. Climbing Euonymus. Invaluable for Rhododendron edging, where it will make a close, evergreen mat, or for background against a wall.

vegetus. Very large-leaved type of the preceding species.

GALAX aphylla, Galax. A most charming low evergreen from 6 to 12 inches high, the crenated bright green leaves rising from an underground stem, and turning brilliant bronze and crimson shades in autumn where exposed to the sun. Dainty white flowers on erect spikes 15 inches.

KALMIA angustifolia. Narrow-leaved Laurel. 2 to 4 feet. Makes fine ground cover. A charming, dwarf sort of the same general habit as *latifolia*, forming dense, low clumps. In early spring showy clusters of wheel-shaped, deep rose-colored flowers.

glauca. Pale Laurel. 1 to 2 feet. Larger flowers than preceding species; crimson-purple and very showy. Both *glauca* and *angustifolia* are invaluable for the Rhododendron border.

LEDUM latifolium. Labrador Tea. 1 to 3 feet. Very useful for Rhododendron border and moist locations. Leaves woolly underneath. Bell-shaped, white flowers in early spring.

LEIOPHYLLUM buxifolium, Sand Myrtle. A dainty genus with small white flowers profusely covering the 2 to 3 foot plant. Small evergreen leaves like tiny boxwood foliage.

prostratum. Mountain Heath. 6 to 12 inches. The Carolina mountains prostrate form of this beautiful genus. Rockwork evergreen, closely covering the surface with a bed of green. In full bloom May or June; produces a striking effect. Delicate flowers are tinged with pink.

LEUCOTHOE catesbaei. 3 to 8 feet. Few shrub evergreens of the broad-leaved sort have the grace of this one. The thick, shining green leaves are evenly disposed on long, recurved branches, with dense racemes of beautiful, white, bell-shaped flowers. As an undershrub or for banks and the borders of streams it is without a rival. The sprays make beautiful winter decoration indoors, turning a rich bronze in the fall where exposed to the sun.

PIERIS (Andromeda) floribunda. 2 to 4 feet. One of the finest of all broad-leaved American shrubs. Compact growth, with shining evergreen leaves and abundant racemes of showy white flowers in May. The next season's buds appear after the flowering season and give the plant the appearance of being in bloom the year round. My stock is all strictly American-grown and of finest quality. The imported *Andromeda* is very often difficult to establish.

japonica. This fine species is of more upright growth than *floribunda*, the young foliage presenting striking shades of reddish pink early in the season. Terminal racemes, very showy.

KELSEY'S HARDY AMERICAN RHODODENDRONS

Hardy American Azaleas

The American Azaleas are among the choicest of all ornaments, whether exotic or native, and were but rarely seen in cultivation before being disseminated by Highlands Nursery.

They are seen at their best when planted in large masses and in properly prepared beds, they richly repay any unusual care given them. Like most ericaceous plants, they love deep, moist, well-drained soil, and these showy native species are particularly adapted to planting in shrub borders and with Rhododendrons, their brilliant blossoms being set off by a background of dark foliage. Azaleas can be successfully grown almost anywhere, following same instructions given for Rhododendrons. The complete hardiness of all the species we offer is unquestionable. No American shrubs equal the native Azaleas, particularly *Azalea lutea* for woodland and hillside plantings.

Our cold Carolina mountains have added no more beautiful plants to the gardens than these American Azaleas, not excepting the magnificent broad-leaved evergreen Rhododendrons of world-wide fame.

arborescens. FRAGRANT WHITE AZALEA. 5 to 15 feet. In June the delightfully spicy fragrant white flowers, with pink stamens, appear in profusion, lasting for weeks. Becomes a spreading clump 3 to 6 feet broad in cultivation; easy culture. The foliage of this variety often colors striking shades of red in late autumn, and is the best of all genus. The clumps offered have from twenty-five to one hundred stems and are heavily budded with enormous balls.

lutea (calendulacea). GREAT FLAME AZALEA. 6 to 15 ft. The most regal of all the species, native or exotic, and a noble representative of our rich Carolina mountain flora. Bartram, speaking of it in his "Travels," calls it the "fiery Azalea," and says: "This epithet fiery I annex to this most celebrated species of Azalea as being expressive of the appearance of its flowers, which are in general of the color of the finest red lead, orange, and bright gold as well as yellow and cream-color. This is certainly the most gay and brilliant-flowering shrub yet known." No more striking landscape effect can be produced than a hillside of *Azalea lutea* in full bloom. Nearly all quoted above 18 inches are budded. These *Azalea lutea* are splendid clumps, with a mass of buds, and range in color from light sulphur-yellow to deep red.

nudiflora. Pinxter Flower. Beautiful clear pink, blooming very early, just following *A. vaseyi*.

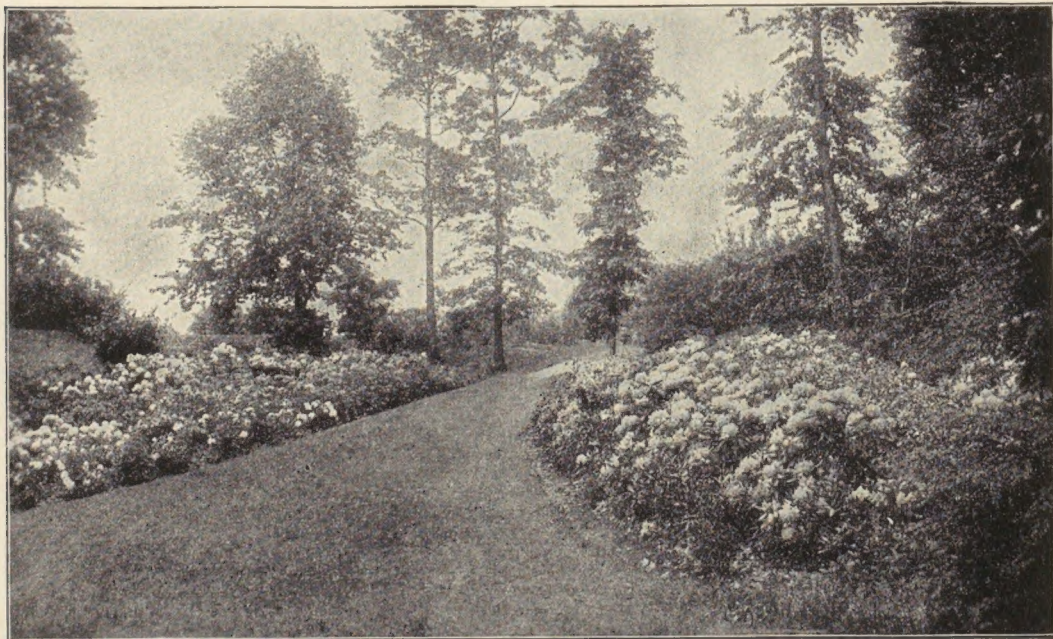
vaseyi. SOUTHERN AZALEA. 6 to 15 ft. This showy Azalea was discovered only as late as 1878, and introduced by Highlands Nursery very soon after. It is of easy culture, and is perhaps the most profuse bloomer of all the native species, and the more conspicuous, as its white, pink, or deep rose-colored flowers appear in early April or May before the foliage. Of erect, slender habit, naturally in cultivation, it becomes more spreading, while retaining the charming light stem-growth. Autumn usually turns the leaves a deep dark crimson, greatly enhancing its beauty and value.

viscosa. EARLY WHITE AZALEA. White sometimes tinged with pink. Makes fine clumps, often reaching a height of 10 to 12 feet quite fragrant.

Exotic Azaleas

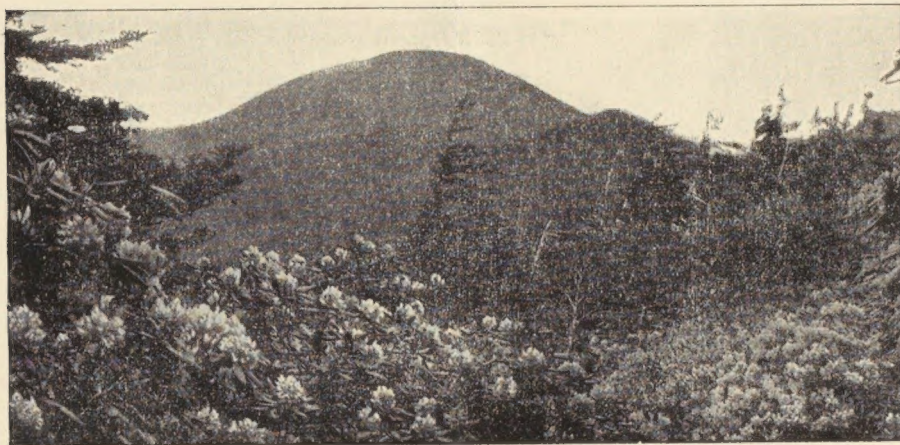
gandavensis. GHENT AZALEAS. Fine colors ranging from sulphur-yellow to crimson. Only second to our native *lutea* in brilliancy of effect.

mollis. Large, yellow to red shades. Very showy but not so long-lived as other species described.



AMERICAN RHODODENDRONS as a background with *hybrids* in front. This is the best combination where *hybrids* can be successfully grown.

THE SUCCESSFUL RHODODENDRON BED



The home of **HARDY AMERICAN RHODODENDRONS** is in the high Carolina Mountains. Mount Mitchell the highest peak of the Rockies is shown in the background. This region also supplies our glorious **Hardy American Azaleas**—the best of all.

Rhododendrons and Mountain Laurel "Collected" Clumps By The Carload For Fall and Spring Planting

For the area covered and effect produced, a carload of Rhododendrons or Kalmias is the cheapest landscape proposition offered. I ship an unusual grade of splendid clumps, each plant a specimen and burlaped separately. Don't accept cheap stock, thrown into cars without burlaping, and the fine hair-like rootlets inevitably exposed. You will be disappointed and find it expensive in the end. While fine results may be had from "collected" Rhododendrons, particularly if purchased from a reliable source, where greatest care is used in digging and handling, results are never so sure as when nursery-grown stock is used.

The number that may be shipped in a car varies largely, depending on sizes. The minimum weight allowed per car is 16,000 pounds.

"Mixed" cars of collected *Rhododendrons*, *catarwbiense*, *Rhododendron maximum*, and *Kalmias* will be sent if desired.

A car may be easily loaded much heavier, with proportionate increased freight charge.

A full car travels with greater safety than one with a small load.

All "clumps" are collected with a good ball and are burlaped separately.

SEND FOR PRICED CATALOG



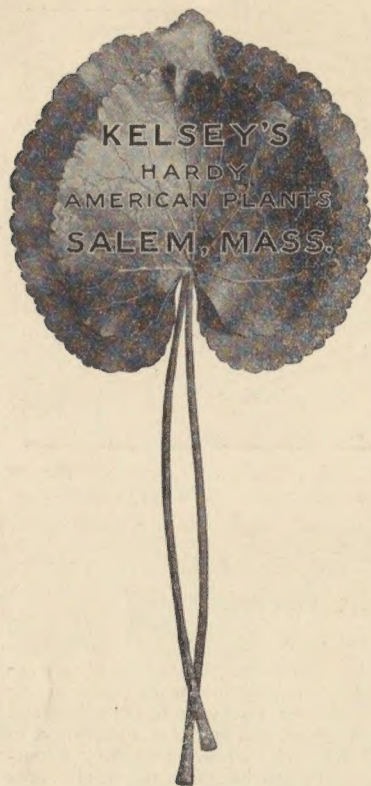
SHORTIA GALACIFOLIA
(*Oconee Bells*)



LEUCOPHYLLUM PROSTRATUM
(*Mountain Heath*)

Two rare and charming little ericaceous evergreens from the Carolina Mountains, introduced by Harlan P. Kelsey.

KELSEY'S HARDY AMERICAN RHODODENDRONS



THE GALAX
(*Galax aphylla*)

Brilliant Green and Bronze evergreen leaves

WATER. How to use it. Thousands of plants are lost through the wrong use of water or the lack of it at the right time. When planting *soak the ground*, giving all it will take *as dirt is being shoveled in*, thus settling the plant or tree firmly, and giving the roots *direct* contact with the soil. This enables the plant to quickly start root and sap action.

After mulching, perhaps in two days the plant should be soaked again and thereafter, except in extreme drought a little spraying of the foliage at night is all that is necessary.

When to Plant

August and September are two of the best months in the year to plant Rhododendrons, Kalmias, Leucothoes, Andromedas and other broad-leaved evergreens, as well as conifers.

Everything should be handled with a ball and burlapped. Azaleas and similar deciduous ericaceous plants may safely and wisely be moved these months and the plants thus become well established for the ensuing year's bloom and growth.

Again all these things may be planted throughout the fall and spring months while dormant. It pays to buy *specimens*, with ball and burlap and to handle properly at every stage of the process of transplanting and getting established.

Visitors Are Always Welcome to Boxford Nursery where Rhododendrons, Kalmias, Azaleas and Specimen Evergreens may be seen growing by thousands. The Superintendent is always on the ground and Mr. Kelsey will be glad to meet anyone interested by special appointment.

Appointments May Be Made with Mr. Kelsey for consultation and advice regarding Rhododendron or other plantings or for overhauling old and unsuccessful plantations.

Naturalistic Effects and Permanence are features in which we specialize.

Send for special circular on August and September planting with prices of Rhododendrons, Kalmias and other broad-leaved Evergreens, Azaleas and Specimen Conifers, or Cone-bearing evergreen.

Boxford Nursery
East Boxford, Mass.
Telephone Topsfield 17-4
If unanswered ring 17-2 or 17-3
Highlands Nursery
Pineola, No. Carolina

Harlan P. Kelsey, Owner
Hawthorne Building
Salem, Massachusetts
Telephone, Salem 820
Always Address Salem Office